

to hide from a vote on balancing the budget by a simple motion to table—which they are hoping obscures their desire to not balance the budget—but they cannot hide from the markets and the legacy of debt President Obama has given this country because that is a real threat to our credit rating.

Yesterday, Standard & Poor's made clear that avoiding the default was only one variable in their rating of U.S. credit. This is what Standard & Poor's said:

We have previously stated our belief that there is a material risk that efforts to reduce future budget deficits will fall short of the target set by Congressional leaders and the administration. In this light, we see at least a one-in-two likelihood that we could lower the long-term rating by one or more notches on the U.S. within the next three months and potentially as soon as early August . . . if we conclude that Washington hasn't reached what we consider to be a credible agreement to address future budget deficits.

Now, after years of reckless spending by President Obama and his Democratic allies, the chickens are coming home to roost. We face an imminent debt crisis, and a failure to take it on will impose a crushing burden on America's families and businesses. Our economy is stagnant, and the failure of the President to lead on deficit reduction now threatens higher interest rates and will slow it even further.

This is Standard & Poor's analysis of the impact of a debt downgrade due to a failure of deficit reduction:

We assume that under this scenario we would see a moderate rise in long-term interest rates (25–50 basis points), despite an accommodative Fed, due to an ebbing of market confidence, as well as some slowing of economic growth (25–50 basis points on GDP growth) amid an increase in consumer and business caution.

For an economy that is slogging along with anemic growth and job creation, this warning should wake people up. It should make the President and the left get serious about deficit reduction. But, instead, the President is still casting about for a plan.

It is important to remind people that we have a plan. It is called cut, cap, and balance. It culminates in a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, and it is supported broadly by the American people. Some folks on the other side claim to be for a balanced budget. They claim to stand with the people. But on a party-line vote they voted to table this proposal today.

When America's Founders came together in the summer of 1787 to draft our Constitution, they faced many challenges. But at heart they had a respect for republican government, they had a respect for the sovereign power of the American people, and they understood that the fundamental principle of popular sovereignty gave the Constitution its legitimacy. For that reason, the Constitution they wrote was clear that the voice of the people should be loudest on the most pressing issues.

The provisions for amending the Constitution provided that on the most im-

portant issues, the people rule directly. The Constitution belongs to the people. It only became law because it was ratified by the people, and it can only be changed by the people.

Our Nation is deeply in debt, and this debt now threatens the very liberty of our families and the vitality of our economy. It is a threat to current and future prosperity. Most importantly, it is a threat to limited constitutional government. The people know this. They know it in their guts. They know the problem here is spending. Our problem is too much spending, not too little taxation, and they know what the solution is: cut, cap, balance, and a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution.

There will be talk now about moving on, but I am not moving on. Democrats want to write the obituary on this bill and turn to some new plan or framework this President produces one way or the other, I guess. But no plan this President produces will get us to balance. Cut, cap, and balance does.

I am not so sure what my friends on the other side are afraid of. The founder of their party, Thomas Jefferson, had a deep respect for the democratic process and the sovereignty of the people. What are they so afraid of? Why not pass cut, cap, and balance? Why not send a balanced budget amendment to the States for ratification? If liberals have a better argument, they can lead a fight against the amendment in the States. All they need is 13 States to defeat the balanced budget amendment. Why not let the people decide?

During the last Presidential campaign, the President frequently told his admirers: Yes, we can. Well, now the American people are saying it back to him. They are telling him they want to balance the budget and that we can balance the budget. We can and we should pass cut, cap, and balance and send a balanced budget constitutional amendment to the States for ratification.

I will just repeat it: If the Democrats so hate the idea of a constitutional amendment to balance the budget, all they have to do is get 13 States to vote against ratification. We have to get 38 States to vote for ratification. That may seem like an overwhelming job, but I don't think so. I think the amendment would be ratified so quickly, Democratic heads would be spinning and, I might add, maybe even some Republican heads as well.

All I can say is this country is in trouble. This country is on the way down to self-destruction unless we get it under control, and I don't see one program from the other side that even comes close to showing how we get this under control—except more taxes and more spending. I guarantee, if we raise taxes, they would spend every stinking dime of it. That has been the history of my 35 years in the Senate, as the most senior Republican. All I can say is we are not going to let them get away with it anymore. We are a minority

now, but I believe we can get back in the majority.

I think the Democrats would do themselves a great favor if they would vote for cut, cap, and balance and a constitutional amendment and let the people—let the people—decide. Let them make this decision. Come on, Democrats, all you need to do is get 13 States. What are you so afraid of? I think what is so fearful is that this waltz that has been going on of big spending all these years is going to come to an end.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 2:16 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 2:21 p.m. when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. MANCHIN).

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE SPACE PROGRAM

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, yesterday the space shuttle *Atlantis* came back in the early morning darkness with those xenon lights illuminating that 3-mile-long runway at the Kennedy Space Center. That is a location that a century ago a set of grandparents of mine had homesteaded under the old Homestead Act, worked the land for the required 4 years. I have a copy of the deed signed by Woodrow Wilson in 1917 to my grandparents. Over three-quarters of a century later, the thought was not lost on me, when we went in that early morning darkness to the launchpad, that my grandparents would have never, ever believed that, so many years later, a grandson was going to literally leave the face of the Earth from almost the old homestead where they had to swat mosquitoes and fight off rattlesnakes and alligators as they eked a living out of that Florida soil.

That was the location *Atlantis* came back to yesterday morning after a 13-day flawless mission after having been launched by the finest launch team in the world. That launch team is now having to disperse in part because we are shutting down the space shuttle program after 30 glorious years. It is an incredible flying machine, with 135

very successful missions that allowed us to do incredible work in space with human beings interacting and, of course, 2 tragic missions—the destruction of *Challenger* on ascent 25 years ago and the destruction of *Columbia* on reentry just a few years ago, in the early part of this last decade.

There would not be as much angst in the space community if the new rockets were ready. The problem is that the rockets are being designed, and in some cases being built, but they then have to be human-rated; that is, all the redundancies for safety as well as the escape systems have to be designed and developed for the new rockets. One of those new rockets is going to fly this fall. It will launch and rendezvous with the International Space Station and will deliver cargo, but it is going to take a few years to rate that for humans. That all the more adds to the angst, the angst of people who have lost their jobs and now do not see the American rocket that is ready to fly immediately upon the shutdown of the space shuttle program.

I have been surprised that we have a lot of people in America who think the space program is being shut down. We have an International Space Station up there at about 225 miles. This thing is huge. It is 120 yards long. From one end zone to another of a football field, that is how big it is. There are six human beings up there doing research right now.

We have trials in the Food and Drug Administration on drugs that have been developed on that International Space Station. The first one that is in trials right now is a vaccine for salmonella. Another one that is getting ready to start trials is a vaccine for MRSA, the highly infectious bacterial disease in hospitals that we find so difficult to control because you cannot get an antibiotic that will control it.

I wanted to say for America's space team, "a job well done." A number of us, including Senator HUTCHISON and myself, had introduced and we passed last week the resolution commemorating the men and women of NASA. Indeed, their congratulations and commendations are certainly in order on a job well done.

The space program lives. The space program will go to greater heights. We will go to Mars, and we will see Americans venture out into the cosmos for even greater discoveries.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS— H.R. 2553

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we are facing a deadline tonight. At midnight, the current reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration expires. That expiration will mean that no funds can be collected or paid out of the airport and airway trust fund starting tomorrow, July 23. The trust fund provides the primary source of funding for the Federal Aviation Administration through excise taxes imposed on airline tickets, aviation fuel, and air cargo shipments.

We asked the Federal Aviation Administration and the Secretary of Transportation what would happen if the extension is not passed today in the Senate, and he said as follows: There will be a partial shutdown of Federal Aviation Administration operations. Approximately 4,000 non-essential FAA staff will be furloughed. Mr. President, 143 of these employees, incidentally, work in my State, mostly in Chicago.

The Airport Improvement Program, which provides construction project grants to airports, will be shut down and unable to obligate grants for projects. Projects already obligated will be able to continue—for example, the O'Hare Airport, Quad City's runways in Illinois—but obligating funds for new projects will be suspended. If the extension continues for a period of time, there may be reimbursement issues with projects that are underway.

There is an unresolved question as to whether this failure to extend the FAA authorization will have an impact on the fees we collect, the aviation taxes and fees we collect from airlines for their operations. It is not clear yet whether we will lose that revenue or whether we can capture it if we reach an agreement at a later time.

Majority Leader REID and Chairman JAY ROCKEFELLER have told House leaders that a shutdown is likely unless a clean extension can be passed. The Senate is hotlining a clean extension today, which I will go to next. There are no objections to this clean extension on the Democratic side, but we do expect an objection from the Republican side.

I want to tell you the request I make for this extension, this clean extension, is in the name of chairman JAY ROCKEFELLER from your State of West Virginia. This is a sad commentary on the political state of affairs in Congress today. This is the 21st extension of this authorization. How could we possibly explain to America that we have been unable so many times to extend this authorization for something so critical to our commerce and our economy? But now we are facing the most serious challenge we ever had when it comes to this extension, and that is the expiration of it this evening. It will have a direct impact on the people who work for the FAA and a direct impact on their operations.

Now, I might add, very quickly, to give peace of mind to people, this will

not have an impact on air traffic control or the safety of our airlines. Not at all. But the orderly operation of the FAA is at risk.

What is this all about? It is a battle over a program called Essential Air Service. Essential Air Service, if I am not mistaken, was initiated by your predecessor, Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia. At the time of deregulation of airlines a decision was made that the smaller communities across America needed a helping hand to maintain air service. We have it in Illinois. Over the years we have reconsidered it, amended it, changed it. It is a shadow of what it started out to be. It is a very small program by standards of the original program.

There is a battle going on between the House and the Senate now, between Republicans in the House and the Democratic leadership in the Senate, about the future of this program. I just want to say in all fairness and all honesty, for goodness' sake, to both sides, save that battle for another day. Let us not jeopardize the operations of the Federal Aviation Administration because of a squabble over an important but relatively small program, and that is what is going to happen. What we are going to hear after I make this request is an objection on the Republican side to extending this authorization of the Aviation Administration with a clean extension, making no statement about changing policy. It just says don't jeopardize the operations of the FAA. Let's keep them in business. Let's fight this out next week or the week after on the Essential Air Service issue, but let's move forward and let the FAA do its business with a clean bill that does not take sides over who is right and who is wrong on Essential Air Service.

What I am offering is neutrality, political neutrality, a clean extension, but I am afraid what I will get back is an insistence if you don't take the House Republican proposal, we will shut it down. I don't think that is a good choice for America. Let us, as politicians, do our battles. Let's never do them at the expense of ordinary people across America who are trying to do good work to improve our airports and make sure we have the safest runways and safest air operations in the world. That should be our highest priority.

So I am going to make this request for a clean extension without getting into this political squabble at all. I hope the Republicans will not object. I hope we can extend this authorization for the Federal Aviation Administration.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 109, H.R. 2553, that a Rockefeller-Hutchison substitute amendment which is at the desk be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, and the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.